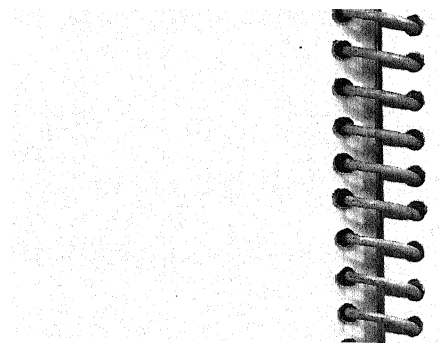


Research Survey in Rural Administration

Abhijit Datta

March, 1970



Preface

The need for well-documented periodic research surveys in social sciences was recognised by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), and it was decided to commission bench-mark research surveys in the various fields of social sciences, including public administration during the first 20 years of Independence. However, in the field of public administration the ICSSR departed from the conventional definition of 'research' to include government reports and other descriptive studies in the survey. This approach was at variance with the traditional scope of research, which includes original contribution to existing knowledge or to research methods by pursuing acceptable criteria of research in social sciences. Illustratively, one could mention the following criteria : (i) adequate information on the collection of facts, (ii) explicit indication of the value judgments underlying the conclusions, (iii) separation of facts from value judgments, (iv) utilisation of all available data bearing on the research problems, and (v) conducting of research within a systematic, conceptual framework.

Realising the importance of research surveys in the field of local administration, and differing from the ICSSR approach in this matter on public administration, two faculty members of the IIPA's Centre for Municipal Administration decided to conduct research surveys in rural and urban administration, by adopting the conventional criteria of social science research to cover the same area and the time horizon as delineated by the ICSSR. A separate note on important government publications was also prepared in respect of both these areas. It is hoped that these research surveys would be found useful by serious scholars interested in the state of the art. These might also provide a reference point for undertaking similar ventures in future on a comparable basis. These surveys may also be compared with the ICSSR surveys in the various fields of social sciences, with the exception of Public Administration.

June, 1976

A. Datta

Professor of Urban Administration,
and Development and Municipal Finance,
IIPA.

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District Administration

Scope: District administration has been defined as "the total action of government in an area specified as a district by a state government"¹. Our concern with district administration, on the other hand, is limited to the institution of the district officer, and not the entire administrative structure of the State government functioning at the district level. Research dealing with aspects of administration at levels above or below the district, but having bearing on the role of the district officer, is included in the survey. Similarly, the relationships of the district officer with his counterparts in the various functional departments in the district, as well as local government institutions, would come within the scope of our survey. Actual research into the institution of the district officer, to be worthwhile, needs to be limited to a specific aspect of his manifold responsibilities and activities, unless the office is studied either in an historical or comparative setting. Failure to do this inevitably results in a tedious

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1. David C. Potter, Government in Rural India: An Introduction to Contemporary District Administration, London, 1964, p.8.

description of the nature of the institution as such. More relevant and significant questions, from the point of view of research, such as: how the institution functions in India and other non-white former British colonies? how to evaluate the institution in the changed context of self-government? and so on, are seldom posed by the researchers.

Volume of Research: Although the volume of literature on district administration in India is vast, actual research studies in the subject is woefully meagre. This is all the more surprising as district administration is regarded as the archstone of Indian administrative system. Our bibliography contains only seven entries in this branch of Rural Administration, out of which not more than 3 are published. Among the 4 unpublished studies two are university theses describing the role of the district officer in two States (4,6), the other two are prescriptive reports (5,7). Of the 3 published research, one is a short case study into the abolition and revival of the office of the divisional commissioner in a particular State (2), one is an examination of the methods of revenue inspection at the district level (1), and one is an omnibus survey of administration in a particular district (3).

Quality of Research: In terms of quality, it is difficult to be satisfied with the methods followed in most of the studies. The studies show excessive reliance on description of the existing situation without trying to spell out their implications in broader contexts. Two studies (2,7) employing the case method and the O & M approach are, really speaking, not studies of district administration as such, but application of particular techniques to the study of administration in situations where the district officer is involved. Four studies (3,4,5,6) are compendium pieces of research without any discernible purpose. Only one study (1) succeeds in the application of research methods to a well-defined field of investigation and is sufficiently analytical and evaluative in its findings.

Future Priorities: In view of the negligible volume and poor quality of research in district administration, the conclusion seems inescapable that improvements are called for in both these directions. Research in district administration in future must be restricted to specific issues, and not allowed to degenerate into aimless collection of facts and opinions.

Panchayati Raj

Scope:

In this survey, we have viewed panchayati raj in a / widor

sense to include all rural local government. The present movement and experiment with a new form of rural local government, popularly known as panchayati raj, is hardly a decade old. In fact, in a few States the change-over to the new system is yet to be completed. During the 'fifties all the States had the old system of rural local government consisting of the district, taluka or local boards. For a few years during the 'sixties in many States the new panchayati system was introduced gradually, side by side with the old system. It would be incorrect to assume that the new system grew out of the old; in fact, the present panchayats were created with a view to democratise the rural community development movement. The result has not been in the direction of strengthening the English concept of local government, but importing the Continental practice of local administration with popular participation. The present survey thus encompasses widely different attitudes to rural local government during the last two decades, and research work in this field is also torn between these two contrasting situations.

The institutional incomparability is not only limited to the old and new forms of rural local government, this is even more glaring between urban and rural local governments, after the introduction of panchayati raj. In fact, official parlance in India would include only the urban local government

within the genetic term 'local self-government'. This dichotomy does not seem to have attracted the notice of the researchers in the field of panchayati raj, even when they study two different varieties of local government working side by side. This is an area which needs some exploration by the researchers on panchayati raj before embarking on their fact collecting and dissecting missions.

Volume of Research: Few other institutional experiments anywhere have occasioned such torrents of printed material as panchayati raj. Much of the literature is admittedly polemical; still, the research output on panchayati raj during less than a decade is substantial by any reckoning. Earlier research in local government was mainly historical in approach with structure as the main focus of interest. In our survey also we have at least four research pieces (24,25,27,28) which carry this tradition in recent years.

The total number of research output included in our survey on rural local government is 28, of which 9 are in the form of articles and the rest 19 published as books or monographs. Of the total number, as many as 21 are on panchayati raj. All the articles are devoted to panchayati raj, published between 1963-69. Only 7 books deal with the older form of rural local government exclusively and 2 studies are concerned with both old and new forms of rural local government. This is ample testimony of active research in panchayati raj.

18. From the angle of subject coverage, two areas seem to be favoured by the researchers: (i) structure and working, and (ii) political aspects. These two areas claim as many as 17 studies. Historical studies account for 4 research pieces and the rest 8 studies are distributed among particular aspects of panchayati raj administration like finance, State control, planning, urbanisation, and official-non-official relations. There has been no comparative research on panchayati raj, and only one historical research examines India's experiment with local self-government before World War II. No attempt has been made by any researcher at international comparisons with India in rural local government.² Similarly, aspects such as public participation, personnel, inter-local relations, area problems, forms of management, administration of specific function, etc. have been neglected by the researchers. By and large, research in panchayati raj have taken an anthropological slant and it is time to switch over to other approaches and aspects not explored so far.

Quality of Research: From the point of view of quality of research, one positive gain seems to be the improvement of techniques and adoption of approaches by the researchers not

2. This has been partially attempted through documentation in, H. Zink et al., Rural Local Government in Sweden, Italy and India: A Comparative Study, London, 1957. Professor T. Bhaskaran acted as the rapporteur for India.

attempted in local government so far. On the other hand, much of the research efforts have only limited and marginal significance from the point of view of administration. It is not clear, for instance, how our understanding of panchayati administration is improved by studying the political process, unless its linkage with administrative action is clearly established. Again, a total evaluation of the working of panchayati raj may be quite deceptive, if not unscientific, since such judgements would inevitably have to be value-loaded. There is another weakness of this type of total evaluation studies. In many cases research is based on field work in a single panchayati institution, without adequate thought as to how such findings could be generalised. Investigation into the totality of a situation within a narrow universe may be quite appropriate for an anthropologist or an O & M expert working in an isolated situation, but this is less useful in examining broader institutional issues.

Historical research done so far in the field of rural local government tends to be excessively concerned with the legal structure, and pay scant attention to the socio-political forces influencing it. In terms of coverage also, only a handful of States have been worked on. Our knowledge of local government in the former princely states is negligible and it would certainly be worthwhile to compare the experience in the large ex-princely states with the erstwhile British

Indian provinces.

We now turn to the rest of the research work in panchayati raj directed to particular aspects of administration. Earlier, we have indicated our preference for this type of studies and suggested a few newer areas where these could be promoted. Since the areas already attended to have not exhausted their potentialities, it would be worthwhile to examine these studies a little more intensively.

The two studies on finance (3,17) both try to relate financial and physical performance, but do so in a somewhat pedestrian manner. More intensive studies on expenditure analysis and application of statistical techniques in this field would perhaps be fruitful. In addition, studies on tax administration and budgeting could be launched in the field of local government by experts in public finance.

Researches into the machinery and procedures of external control over panchayati raj bodies (5,21) do not examine the practicability of alternative arrangements, nor do they question the existing inter-governmental relationships with enough conviction. The study on planning in relation to panchayati raj (18) is again a disappointing piece in as much as more attention seems to have been paid to the problem of communication between the planners and the people than the extent of planning discretion left with the panchayats.

Between the two studies on urbanisation (10,20), the one on metropolitan Calcutta raises the unique administrative problems of the peri-urban areas. All these studies are mainly descriptive in nature and while they draw our attention to particular areas of panchayati raj administration, they lack the methodological rigor to be exciting.

The most creditable piece of research on panchayati raj examined in the survey is focussed on the relationships between the officials and non-officials (12). The study is methodologically sound, rich in data and responses, and perceptive in its analysis. Although the author calls it an "anthropologically oriented depth study", he has avoided the common pitfalls of other researches with similar orientation. The only criticism one can make is that the supposed linkages between the socio-economic background of the officials and non-officials and the "crisis situations" analysed, do not appear to be very strong.

Future Priorities: From our analysis of research in panchayati raj two conclusions follow, one negative and the other positive. On the negative plane, future research needs to be discouraged which aims to evaluate the entire working of the panchayati raj, except perhaps in a purely historical study. On the positive side, more basic research needs to be promoted on local government and, so far as administration is concerned, on particular aspects and specific problems -

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that can be handled satisfactorily by adhering to the established canons of social science research.

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District Administration

Books and Monographs:-

1. Avasthi, A. Revenue Inspection at the District Level, New Delhi, 1965.

This study, based on field investigations and documents, attempts to examine various methods of district level inspection, operating in Madras, Maharashtra and U.P. and deals with the origin, role, nature, scope and problems of such inspection and the changing role of the Collector, the Divisional Commissioner and the Board of Revenue.

2. Avasthi, A. Abolition of the Posts of Commissioner in Madhya Pradesh and Their Revival, New Delhi, 1967.

This case study deals with the administrative, financial and political reasons for abolishing the office of the Divisional Commissioners in M.P. in 1948, and the developments after its revival in 1956.

3. Desai, N.B. Report on the Administrative Survey of the Surat District, Bombay, 1958.

This report is based on case studies at the taluk, district and divisional levels covering a period of five years and points out the weak spots in the present structure of revenue administration and government departments of Surat district, in the context of planning in a welfare state.

4. Rai, Haridwar, District Officer in Bihar: A Study of his Office and Functions, Patna, 1964 (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Patna University).

This study is based on official documents, interviews with government officials at all levels, field observation dealing with the historical evolution of District Officer, his powers, functions, impact of the changes on his traditional functions and his new role in the present context.

5. Shah, Manubhai M. Report on the Impact of the Changes in the District Administration since Independence in Kheda District, Vallabh Vidyanagar, 1962 (Unpublished).

This report is based on a random sample survey of villages and talukas and attempts to assess the functions which the Collector discharged in 1947 and 1961, changes in Kaira district administration, their impact on the people, along with suggestions for improvements.

6. Sharma, Sudesh K. District Officer in the Punjab, Chandigarh, 1968 (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Panjab University).

The study is primarily based on secondary materials, supplemented by field investigations through questionnaires and interviews, and deals with the historical evolution of the district officer in the Punjab, his duties and responsibilities, the changing nature of his activities and his workload.

7. Trivedi, R.K., Chaturvedi, P.P. and Srivastava, Ramesh, District Collectorates in U.P.: A Study, New Delhi, 1967 (Unpublished report prepared for the Administrative Reforms Commission).

This case study of Kanpur district collectorates is based on replies to questionnaires, supplemented by interviews and discussions with district and State-level officials and deals with the various functions of the collectorates including staff recruitment and incentives, office management and redressal of citizens' grievances.

Panchayati Raj

Articles:-

1. Anand, J.C. "Panchayat Elections in Punjab: A Case Study". Political Science Review, March, 1963, pp. 21-36.

It is a case study through participant-observation of the factors which affect the selection of a panchayat candidate, their electoral and voting behaviour and group loyalties.

2. Asthana, B.C. "Kshetra Pramukhs - the Emerging Leaders", Kurukshetra, May, 1967, pp. 14-15.

This study is based on interviews on the basis of questionnaire and gives the socio-economic background of

the Pramukh, his motivation in seeking office, concept of his role and some suggestions for changes in the organisation of a block.

3. Bhalerao, M.M. and Singh, Ramdhani, "A Study of a few Economic Aspects of Panchayats in Varanasi District", Artha Vijnana, June, 1969, pp. 196-209.

This study, based on a sample survey, attempts to analyse the income, expenditure and activities of panchayats in a district of U.P.

4. Chaudhury, Ranjit, "Panchayats and Interest Groups: Study of a Bengal Village", The Economic Weekly, September, 1964, pp. 1527-30.

In this article, arising out of a field study, the author examines the nature of group behaviour and inter-group relations in panchayati raj, the social background of village elites and how the village panchayat might act as an institution of social change.

5. Jain, P.N. and Chatterjee, B.B., "Supervision in Gram Panchayat in Maharashtra" Quarterly Journal of Local Self-Government Institute, July, 1965, pp. 73-85.

This is a study based on secondary sources and interviews regarding the effect of supervision on the working of panchayats through an analysis of modes of supervision such as, inspection and audit, advice, education, incentives and deterrents carried out by supervisors.

6. Mehta, S.C. "Social Background and Attitudes of Panchayat Samiti Members: A Case Study of Delhi Block", Quarterly Journal of Local Self-Government Institute, January-March, 1963, pp. 210-245.

The author gives the social and family background and the attitudes of emerging leaders in panchayat samiti towards social, economic and educational problems together with an account of the organizational, personnel and working aspects of panchayat samiti on the basis of interviews based on a questionnaire.

7. Narain, Iqbal, "Political Behaviour in Rural India: The Case of Panchayat Election in Rajasthan", Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, July, 1967, pp. 109-128.

In this observation-oriented case study of a panchayat s. niti in Rajasthan, the causes of victory and defeat of various panchayat candidates have been analysed and political techniques of mobilising electoral support studied.

8. Rao, K.R., "Leadership in Community Development Village" The Economic Weekly, September, 1965, pp. 1375-1379.

This article is based on a case study of a village in Andhra Pradesh and deals with the impact of panchayat institutions on the development of responsible leadership with emphasis on the way individual rises to leadership, their qualities and affiliations and the nature of their goals.

9. Robins, Robert S. "Political Elite Formation in Rural India: The Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Elections of 1949, 1956 and 1961". The Indian Journal of Politics, November, 1967 pp. 838-860.

This is a field survey designed to elicit information and gain insight regarding the process of elite formation in the villages through recruitment to major factional groups, nomination to village office, and election to office.

Books and Monographs:-

10. Bhattacharya, Mohit, Rural Self-Government in Metropolitan Calcutta, Bombay, 1965.

The author, basing on field survey and documentation, has analysed the functions, structure, finance and performance of both old and new forms of rural local authorities within metropolitan Calcutta and their problems arising out of urbanisation.

11. Desai, K.S. Problems of Administration in Two Indian Villages, 1961.

This is the result of a survey of two villages in Baroda district regarding the structure and functioning of State and local government agencies at the village level, the response of the people to their working, the defects in their working and improvements called for.

12. Gaikwad, V.R. Panchayati Raj and Bureaucracy: A Study of the Relationship Patterns, Hyderabad, 1969.

This is a study through participant-observation and interviews regarding the existing patterns of relationship between the elected representatives and bureaucracy, the socio-economic background of both the groups and their impact on the administration of panchayati raj.

13. Gupta, Ranjit, Community Development, Cooperation and Panchayati Raj in Alipore: A Pilot Survey, Delhi, 1964.

The survey was undertaken to examine the working and achievement of various institutions of a block in the field of agriculture and other related programmes, the causes of their success and failure.

14. India, Planning Commission, Programme Evaluation Organization, Some Successful Panchayats: Case Studies, Delhi, 1961.

The study covers 9 successful panchayats and attempts to discover the factors responsible for their success together with background information of the villages.

15. Jacob, George (Ed.) Readings in Panchayati Raj, Hyderabad, 1967

This book is a collection of 6 research studies dealing with the working of panchayati raj in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madras and Mysore covering aspects such as panchayat elections, powers of panchayat samities and zilla parishads.

16. Khanna, B.S. Village Institutions in Punjab: Working of Village Agencies with special reference to People's Participation, Chandigarh, 1969.

This study is based on documentary and field research and aimed at collecting information regarding the organization and functioning of village institutions, such as, panchayats, cooperatives and schools, and to gauge people's attitude and their participation in these institutions.

17. Krishnaswamy, J. Studies in Local Finance and Taxation with special reference to Madras State, Bombay, 1958.

This documentary and field research is based on an intensive study of a sample municipalities and panchayats of one district of Madras from the angle of local finance and taxation and the problems faced by these institutions in raising the standard of local services.

18. Masaldan, P.N. Planning and the People: A Study of Public Participation in Planning in Uttar Pradesh, Bombay, 1964.

This survey attempts to find out the attitude of the public towards planning and development programmes and the methods used to influence their attitude.

19. Mathur, M.V. and others, Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan: A Case Study in Jaipur District, New Delhi, 1966.

This report is based on field survey designed to examine the impact of working of panchayati raj on local leadership, behaviour of its members, its performance in development programmes together with its financial and administrative problems.

20. Narain, Iqbal; Mathur, P.C. and Verma, P.S. The Pattern of Urban-Rural Relationship: A Case Study in Jaipur District, Jaipur, 1967.

This case study, relying mainly on documentary sources, presents the problems and prospects of urban development in rural areas of Sanganer and Amer in the context of urbanisation and population increase and their implications for local government.

21. Narain, Iqbal; and Mathur, P.C.(Eds.), Old Controls and New Challenges, New Delhi, 1970 (in Press)

This study is based mainly on the results of field research with the help of questionnaire and interviews, supplemented by documentary materials, on the pattern of supervision and control of panchayati raj institutions by the State governments in Madras, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

22. Purwar, Vijaya Lakshmi, Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, 1960.

The author studies the working and achievements of panchayats in U.P., more particularly their role as development agencies and their relations with the various State departments, with the help of field survey and secondary materials.

23. Rao, A. V. Ramān, Structure and Working of Village Panchayats, Poona, 1954.

This research study is based on replies to questionnaire administered in the field and deals with the structure finances, working and supervision and control of various types of panchayats in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Madras.

24. Rao, V. Venkata, A Hundred Years of Local Self-Government and Administration in Andhra and Madras States, 1850 to 1950, Bombay, 1960.

The author, relying on documentary and secondary materials, covers the history of local self-government in Andhra Pradesh and Madras, the local government machinery and functions, local finance, local personnel administration and the external relations of local authorities.

25. Rao, V. Venkata, A Hundred Years of Local Self-Government and Administration in Assam, Gauhati, 1963.

This study is based on documentary and secondary materials and covers the historical development of local self-government in Assam, its constitutional structure and functions, local finance, staffing and inter-governmental relations.

26. Retzlaff, Ralph H. Village Government in India, Bombay, 1962.

This is a case study of a village through participant-observation and concentrates on the working of a village panchayat, together with the authors' observations on panchayati raj in general.

27. Sharma, M.P. Evolution of the Rural Self-Government and Administration in the Uttar Pradesh, Bombay, 1957.

This book is based on documentary research and deals with the history of rural district boards in U.P., their constitution, elections, powers, internal organisation, staffing, State control, finance and working.

28. Tinker, Hugh, The Foundations of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan, and Burma, London, 1954.

This study is based on documentary research dealing with the gradual development of local self-government in the former British India from the early days upto 1935.

A Note on Government Reports

In Public Administration, more than in any other field of social science, the importance of government reports remains paramount. These official documents help to develop the discipline in three ways: (a) collection of basic information and data, (b) analysis of particular problems of administration, and (c) attempting to solve these problems by suggesting changes in the administrative system. The role of government reports in countries inheriting the British system of administration is even more important from the point of view of administrative reforms, although the methods adopted by the traditional Royal Commission form of enquiry - with the inevitable questionnaire addressed to all and sundry, taking evidence from deeply entrenched interest groups, summarizing the currently-held beliefs, and a search for a 'reasonable' view-point - leave one with a feeling of frustration and cynicism at the eventual outcome. Of late, there has been an awareness of the necessity for research-based enquiry commissions and committees even in the United Kingdom. In India, the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) was probably the first to recognise the need for systematic research into specific problems of administration by competent social scientists.

2. In our sub-field, there are three areas which constitute 'Rural Administration', that is to say, area administration, district administration, and panchayati raj. Government reports of 'deep and genuine significance for the discipline' identified for the purpose of the present note number only 7, of which 1 falls under district administration and the rest 6 come under panchayati raj.

3. Area Administration: There is no report on what has been euphemistically called 'area administration', although a recent committee report does mention the term 'area management' without specifying its attributes, while asserting that "a whole area should be treated as one unit for administrative purposes and rural and urban areas falling within it should be treated as integral parts of the area for purpose of overall planning and implementation of development projects".¹ At the same time, the Committee was "aware of the serious difficulties in introducing any new system of administration or in demarcating areas for the purpose". If 'area management' - whatever it might mean - is so good, why it should be applied only for planning purposes is left unexplained; when it came to its application, the Committee suddenly became aware of the serious difficulties and opted

1. India, Report of the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee, Vol. I, Delhi, p. 45.

for more conventional solution.

4. District Administration: The ARC Study Team's report on district administration is by far the most important document, in an all-India setting. In the post-Independence period, several States such as, UP, Maharashtra and Madras, had their own committees on the reorganisation of district administration mainly from the point of view of work procedure and office management. More recently, some of the States' administrative reforms committees have made detailed recommendations regarding the role of the Collectors in the changed set-up, particularly after the emergence of panchayati raj. The reports of the Punjab, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh are of particular interest in this connection. None of these reports is deep enough to be of enduring value to the system of district administration as a whole.

5. One interesting feature of the ARC Study Team's report is the setting-up of working groups in all the States and three Union Territories to study the pattern of district administration in the various parts of India. However, only five of these working groups submitted their reports in time to be of use to the Study Team. Two research projects were also commissioned to study the machinery for redressal of public grievances against district administration in two districts (Barabanki, U.P. and Sagar, M.P). The Study Team

itself examined the systems of local government in foreign countries, with widely different political and administrative backgrounds, such as the UK, USSR, USA, France, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. This highlights the weakness of the Study Team's approach, as it was itself not sure where international comparisons might be fruitful and relevant.

6. Panchayati Raj: The most important and influential document on panchayati raj is the famous report by the Committee headed by Balvantray Mehta (1). As a result of the recommendations of the Committee, the old system of rural local government, fashioned during the 'twenties after the Montford Reforms, was discarded and replaced by a new system of three-tier rural local government, popularly known as panchayati raj. Before the Mehta Committee, two other all-India Committees examined local finance (1951) and taxation (1955) in great detail; but these are of historical interest in the changed context of the introduction of panchayati raj. Significantly, the Mehta Committee was not appointed to strengthen a "viable system of local democracy", as in the United Kingdom, but to examine the administrative aspects of field-level rural development programmes. It was quite an accident that the Committee thought it proper to devise a system of rural local government to discharge the field-level responsibilities of the Central/State Governments. So, from the limited objective of plan implementation of a particular programme, the entire system of rural local government underwent

a complete metamorphosis and, in this process, the English concept of local self-government suffered the first casualty.

7. Closely following the Mehta report, a number of States appointed their own committees on panchayati raj and the reports of Gujarat (4), Maharashtra (5) and Rajasthan (6) may be considered sufficiently important in influencing the existing pattern of panchayati raj in these States. The Maharashtra report (headed by V.P. Naik) is an excellent document and outshines any report on panchayati raj produced in the country. It is no accident that the recent ARC Study Team report on district administration closely follows the logical imperatives of the Naik report.

8. The other two all-India reports on panchayati raj finances and elections (2,3) were both headed by K. Santhanam. The Santhanam report on finances is a disappointing exercise which does not even present a comprehensive financial picture of panchayati raj institutions in the various States and confines itself to generalities. The other Santhanam report on panchayati elections examines such controversial questions as the role of political parties in panchayats, unanimity in panchayat elections and so on, and tries to reach compromise solutions without displaying any deep conviction in the subject.

Important Government Reports

District Administration

1. India (Administrative Reforms Commission), Report of the Study Team on District Administration, Delhi, 1967.

Panchayati Raj

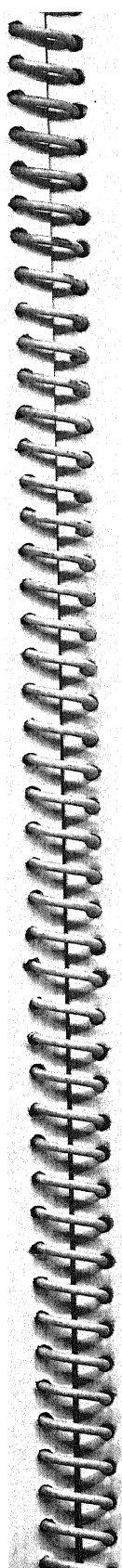
1. India (Planning Commission: Committee on Plan Projects), Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service, Vol. I, Delhi, 1957.
2. India (Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation), Report of the Study Team on Panchayati Raj Finances, Part I, Faridabad, 1963.
3. India (Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation), Report of the Committee on Panchayati Raj Elections, New Delhi, 1965.
4. Gujarat (Rural Development Department), Report of the Democratic Decentralisation Committee, Part I, Rajkot, 1960.
5. Maharashtra (Co-operation and Rural Development Department), Report of the Committee on Democratic Decentralisation, Bombay, 1961.
6. Rajasthan (Panchayat and Development Department), Report of the Study Team on Panchayati Raj, Jaipur, 1964.



Research Survey in Urban Administration

Mohit Bhattacharya

March, 1970



Urban administration is provided by a network of municipal authorities, town area committees and notified area authorities, cantonment boards, and different types of special purpose statutory authorities such as improvement trusts, development authorities, water supply and sanitation authorities, housing boards, transport undertakings, and electricity boards. To the extent other levels of government impinge on the operations of urban administration, they also form part of the administration of urban areas. As a microcosm of public administration, urban administration embraces within it all the familiar facets of the former. Broadly speaking, there are the problems of structure and organisation, functions, personnel, finance, and relations internal as well as external. The application of different disciplines such as economics, sociology and politics to the problems of urban administration would naturally enrich research in this sphere in respect of both methods and contents. In fact, it is this inter-disciplinary approach to urban area problems that has led, in recent times, to the steady growth of what is commonly called 'urban studies'.

Stock-taking of Research

After these preliminary observations, we are now in a better position to take stock of research done so far

in urban administration. There are in all 24 research studies listed in the appended bibliography. These studies can be classified into three broad types on the basis of the institutions examined in them. As Table 1 clearly shows, municipal government has been the theme of research in most cases. Only two research pieces have exclusively studied the

Table 1
Classification of Research on the Basis of
Institutions Studied

Institution Studied	No.
Municipal Government	20
Special Agencies	2
Higher Level Governments	2
Total	24

special agencies. The involvement of higher level governments in urban administration has been examined in the remaining two studies. This broad classification of research work has been made on the basis of the major emphasis on specific types of institutions. It is not unlikely that in some studies more than one type of institution have been covered. For example, apart from No.11 and No.15 which deal specifically with the special agencies, these authorities have also been included

in at least two research pieces, viz., No. 10 and No.24. From this classification, one can draw the obvious conclusion that research on the special agencies and on the involvement of higher level governments in urban administration has been very negligible indeed. Also, no research work has been done on the cantonment boards and the town area committees and the notified area authorities. In other words, the public administration problems of small town governments have failed to attract the researcher's eye.

Even in the field of municipal government, a closer scrutiny would reveal that the general tendency is to undertake macro-studies. Thus, municipal government as a whole or municipal finance in its totality has been studied. But, it is surprising that apart from No.2 and No.5, there is no other micro-study dealing with specific city or town government. Apart from a few studies on Calcutta, no research work has been done on the government of big cities such as Bombay, Madras and Delhi, each of which governs a population bigger than some of the States and all the Union Territories, and manages important civic services and substantial financial resources. This is all the more amazing, as municipal government has been in existence in this country for more than a century and a half.

Turning now to the contents of research, we would like to give some indications of the specific problems dealt

with in the research pieces under review. Themewise, these studies can be grouped into five broad classes. The principle followed here is to place a particular research piece in a specific group on the basis of its major orientation to a distinct theme. It can be seen from Table 2 that nearly half of the research studies have taken up finance as their theme. In five research pieces, the main emphasis has been on structure and organisation. The number of historical studies comes to only four. Of the remaining four, two deal with inter-governmental relations, one is on the theme of citizen-administration relations, and one is an election study. It may be pointed out that the studies on structure are generally of omnibus character including a little bit of almost every aspect. This holds good also for the historical studies.

A look at Table 2 makes it clear that, apart from very limited research efforts on specific themes, certain aspects of urban administration have not received any attention at all. For example, there is not a single research work on the problem of personnel administration. On the administration of specific urban local services such as water supply and sewerage, public health, public works, education, transportation, and planning, one is yet to come across any research effort, which testifies to the disconcerting fact of utter academic neglect of urban area administration.

Table 2

Classification of Research on the Basis of Contents

Contents	No.
History	4
Structure	5
Finance	11
Relational Aspects	3
Election	1
Total	24

There is hardly any study exclusively on the inter-relations between politics and administration, although it is generally appreciated that in a democratic polity, institutional administration is almost the handmaiden of political forces.

Even when research has been done in certain areas, the quantity of research pieces is almost negligible. If we leave out 'finance' on which quite a few studies have been undertaken, the output in the remaining areas is not at all encouraging. Historical studies, tracing the growth of municipal institutions are very few in number. Only three of the historical studies are on separate States, and the remaining one covers whole India plus Pakistan and Burma.

There is ample scope, therefore, for launching historical studies either State-wise, or institution or city-wise. So far as historical research on special agencies is concerned, there is just one solitary research piece (No.15) in this area. The research gap is thus clearly discernible in this sphere.

Research studies on 'structure' are also not many. Apart from one (No.12), all other studies listed in the bibliography are in the nature of a macro-studies incorporating almost all the aspects of administration. Committee system which is so vital to local administration has been the theme of research of only one study (No.12). The other elements of structure such as the executive, the mechanism and operation of departmental organisation, work procedure in general - these have never been selected as subjects worthy of research. In fact, at the urban area level, there is not a single research work on the subject of decision-making, which is the very heart of public administration. Similarly, inter-governmental relations - both horizontal and vertical - have attracted little attention. Within an urban area, several local authorities usually operate different functions, and their interrelationships would reveal the web of local government at that level. This theme has, however, not been able to draw the researcher's

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eye so far. Again, the involvement of State Governments and their areal units (district and divisional administrations) in urban area administration has rarely been taken up for research. It is common knowledge that in India the State Governments constitute almost a part of urban administration. Evidently, therefore, there is wide scope for undertaking research on State-local relations, which can be studied either State-wise or on the basis of inter-State comparison.

Although 'finances' has been the theme of research of about a dozen studies, there are some important aspects of urban local finance on which no research has been done. For example, apart from only one study (No.13) no research has been undertaken on the problems of specific taxes. Property taxation, which is the mainstay of municipal finance in many States, has not been studied in depth by any researcher so far. Similarly, it is difficult to mention a second study on octroi. There is only one research study on the subject of State grants-in-aid (No.7). On financial administration, there is none. Municipal budgeting and accounts are totally neglected subjects, and the same is true of the financing of specific urban services such as water supply,

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1. A very descriptive work on metropolitan government is: Bhattachayra, Mohit, et. al. Government in Metropolitan Calcutta: A Manual, Bombay, 1965.

transportation and so on. So far as the problems of institutional finance are concerned, apart from the finances of municipal authorities and the improvement trusts to some extent, the financial problems of no other urban local authority have been studied by researchers. There is a real dearth of micro-studies on local finance in specific urban areas and on particular urban services. Also, State-wise studies and comparative research on urban local finance should receive more attention in future.

At this stage, some remarks about the problem of research methodology will be in order. Contemporary social science research is generally acknowledged to be extremely method conscious, and sophisticated techniques of research such as survey methods, interview schedules, structured questionnaire, participant observation method etc. are increasingly being used to systematise data collection and organise research. Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to lay one's hand on even one research study in the field of urban area administration where the researcher has been overtly conscious of the methodological problem. The general tendency is, thus, to attempt to study the totality of problems in a particular area and to be lost in a vast mass of uncoordinated data and information. A fact, as perhaps one of Pirandello's characters had said, is like a sack; it

will not stand up till you have put something in it.² From the infinite universe of data, only those are picked up which the researcher considers relevant to his enquiry. Research, by its very nature, has to have a distinct focus, and for this one has to start with a few key hypotheses, to test which only relevant data are to be collected. In the absence of hypotheses, the researchers are in general unconscionably data-hungry, and there is hardly any conscious attempt to distinguish between the relevant and the irrelevant data.

The inter-disciplinary approach to urban administration is more talked about than actually pursued. Public administration, if I may say so, lives on reflected glory. It is yet to develop an autonomous corpus of knowledge which would entitle it to the status of a separate discipline. To my mind, there is nothing to be alarmed about it, as public administration can enrich itself by drawing freely upon the resources and techniques of other disciplines such as sociology, politics, economics, geography and so on.

'Urban administration' can be immensely enriched by a greater degree of free-mixing between it and the various other basic disciplines. Surprisingly enough, the study of the administrative problems of urban areas in India has generally been neglected by these disciplines, although it is not difficult

2. Quoted in E.H. Carr, What is History? Pelican Books, 1964.

to come across research studies on specific urban problems by sociologists or demographers which are rarely related to the context of local public administration.³ In future, one would, therefore, like to see more research studies on diverse problems of urban administration undertaken by economists, sociologists, geographers and political scientists either individually or in mixed groups.

'Urban administration' would be able to claim a degree of autonomy only if research efforts would succeed in building up a body of concepts relating area problems to the 'urban' situation. An urban area has a distinct personality which is reflected in the way of life and living within that area. It affects the character of urban administration and lends the latter a certain uniqueness. An important aim of research should be to conceptualise on the 'urban' distinctiveness, and only thus can 'urban administration' emerge as a sufficiently identifiable, separate entity. In this connection, it needs to be mentioned that, even without aping the American way, it may be instructive to intelligently follow the trend of 'urban studies' in the United States.

Comparative studies in urban administration are hard to come by. No doubt, comparison in social science

3. In this connection, reference may be made to a number of research studies, financed by the Research Programme Committee of the Planning Commission, on urbanisation and urban problems. Most of these are, however, mainly demographic surveys paying little or no attention to problems of urban local administration.

is an extremely hazardous exercise. Yet, it is through careful comparisons that general propositions can be formulated, which will greatly facilitate the development of 'urban administration' as a fairly distinct branch of knowledge. There is vast scope for future research on inter-institutional, inter-State and even inter-city comparisons.

Summing up

I have tried to bring into clear relief, in the foregoing paragraphs, the actual state of research in 'urban administration'. It should have been clear by now that, both in terms of quantity and quality, research done so far in this area is far from encouraging. In fact, the entire field of local government has, by and large, been deprived of the sunshine of academic research in India. The present survey leaves one in no doubt that there are many dark areas crying out for light and innumerable gaps that need to be filled up. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the sub-field of 'urban administration' looks, at the end of this survey, almost like a blank sheet with a few dotted areas merging into vast empty space.

Evidently, more research is needed in the field surveyed in this report. At the same time, it should be pointed out that better research is as much necessary as more research. Perhaps, I may be justified in pleading for the

former rather than the latter. In future, a policy on promotion of research should include a definite emphasis on the methodology of research. Prospective researchers should, therefore, be asked to clearly spell out the hypotheses they want to test and the methodology they want to adopt to collect and collate data and information in a systematic and scientific manner.

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It deals with municipal government as a whole. Based on materials collected from municipal bodies, State Government Departments, and administrative and legal documents, it tries to blend description with evaluation.

2. Ashraf, Ali. The City Government of Calcutta: A Study of Inertia, Bombay, 1966.

Based on field visits and secondary sources, this research study critically examines the operative forces conditioning the working of the Calcutta Corporation. It has also dealt with the problems of reform of the city government.

3. Barnabas, A.P. The Experience of Citizens in Getting Water Connections, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, 1965.

On the basis of field studies and through the use of interview technique, the author has studied in this brief research piece the causes of dissatisfaction among the public in regard to municipal administration. Water supply has been taken up as a case. He has also dealt with the problem of corruption as it appears to the lay public. The study ends up in a prescriptive vein.

4. Bhambhri, C.P. Municipalities and their Finances, Jaipur, 1969.

This is a study of the finances of five major municipalities in Rajasthan viz., Ajmer, Alwar, Bikaner, Jaipur and Kota. Based on information and data collected from budget documents and through interviews, it is mainly descriptive and goes well beyond its avowed objective e.g., study of municipal finance.

5. Bhatt, Mahesh and Trivedi, M.S. Metropolitan Finance in a Developing Economy: Allahabad Municipal Corporation, A Case Study, Ahmedabad, 1969.

Based on published data, this research monograph has attempted a preliminary analysis of the finances of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation highlighting main trends in revenue, grants-in-aid and expenditure over the twenty-year period ending in 1969.

6. Bhattacharya, Mohit. State Directorates of Municipal Administration, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, 1969.

Based on field studies and secondary sources, this research work has described and evaluated the organisation and working of Directorates of Municipal Administration in India.

7. Datta, Abhijit. Inter-Governmental Grants in Metropolitan Calcutta, Bombay, 1965.

Based on field studies, this research monograph deals with State-local fiscal relations with special reference to State grants-in-aid to both rural and urban local bodies in the Calcutta Metropolitan District. The approach is empirical and evaluative.

8. Datta, Abhijit and Banney, David C. Municipal Finances in the Calcutta Metropolitan District: A Preliminary Survey, Bombay, 1965.

Based on field survey, this study analyses the finances of municipal authorities in the Calcutta Metropolitan District in the context of urbanisation and urban development. It highlights the main problems of municipal finance in the study area and suggests lines of reform.

9. Datta, Abhijit and Bhattacharya, Mohit. Centre-State Relations in Urban Development, (Mimeographed), Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, 1967.

A condensed version of this research study was published in the Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. XIII, No.2, 1967.

10. Ghosh S. Local Finance in Urban Areas, Calcutta, 1964.

Through local visits and personal investigation and with the help of secondary materials such as laws, reports and other public documents, the author has analysed in this research work the problems of municipal finance (including the finances of the Calcutta Improvement Trust) in West Bengal. The study, apart from being analytical, is also prescriptive.

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Based on field visits and secondary sources, this study deals with the role of special purpose bodies in the

administration of specific services in the Calcutta Metropolitan District. Its approach is descriptive, comparative and evaluative.

12. Jha, Chetkar. Local Government by Committee, Patna, 1963.

Based chiefly on secondary sources, this research study critically examines the role of committee system in urban local government. The approach is analytical and comparative.

13. Kapoor, B.P. The Place of Octroi Duties in the Finance of Municipal Boards of Uttar Pradesh, Bombay, 1967.

It embodies the analysis and results of the study of municipal finance in Uttar Pradesh. Special emphasis has been laid on the administration of octroi. Material for the study was collected mainly from the annual reports of various municipalities.

14. Krishnaswamy, J. Studies in Local Finance and Taxation with special reference to Madras State, Bombay, 1958.

Relying on field survey and documentary sources, this study deals with the problems and prospects of local finance in one district of Madras. It covers the finances of both urban and rural local bodies.

15. Mukherjee, Nilamani. The Port of Calcutta: A Short History, Calcutta, 1968.

This is essentially a historical study dealing with the rise and growth of the Calcutta Port. Based on reports and documentary evidence, it relates the Port to its vast industrial hinterland, describes the role of the Port Trust in administering the Port and concludes with the problems of modernisation and improvement of the Port.

16. Pande, V.K. Municipal Finance in Maharashtra, Aurangabad, 1968.

Mainly based on official reports, budgets and accounts, this study (a Ph.D. thesis) has reviewed the problems of taxation and finance of the city and town municipalities in the Marathwada region of the Maharashtra State. The study is analytical and evaluative.

17. Prasad, Ramayan: Local Self-Government in Vindhya Pradesh, Bombay, 1963.

Based on secondary sources, this study contains a rambling discussion on various aspects of local self-government - both rural and urban - in Vidhya Pradesh. It is also recommendatory in many places.

18. Rao, V.V. A Hundred Years of Local Self-Government in Assam, Calcutta, 1965.

Based on public documents, reports and laws, it deals mainly with the evolution of local-self-government - both rural and urban - in Assam.

19. Rao, V.V. A Hundred Years of Local Self-Government in the Andhra and Madras States, 1850 to 1950, Bombay, 1960.

It is primarily a historical study based on secondary sources, laws and public documents. Both rural and urban local government systems have been covered.

20. Rastogi, K.M. Local Finance : Its Theory and Working in India? Gwalior, 1967.

This is an omnibus volume - part of a Ph.D. thesis - dealing with almost every aspect of the finances of local bodies, both urban and rural. Based on secondary materials it covers the principles and practices of local finance, and suggests ways and means to secure proper administration of local finance.

21. Sharma, B.A.V. and Jangam, R.T. The Bombay Municipal Corporation: An Election Study, Bombay, 1962.

Dealing mainly with election study and voting behaviour, this research monograph goes wide a field to discuss the organisation and functions of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, the problems of communalism and corruptibility of the councillors, the accountability of the Commissioner and so on. The study is based on field investigations and interviews.

22. Sinha, K.K. Local Taxation in a Developing Economy, Bombay, 1968.

Relying mainly on secondary materials and partly on field studies, this study has sought to analyse and examine the taxation system of rural and urban local bodies. The approach is analytical and comparative, and at some places, reform-oriented.

23. Tinker, Hugh. The Foundations of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan and Burma, London, 1954.

Based on documentary sources such as laws, reports and other public documents, this is primarily a historical study dealing with the evolution of local self-government both urban and rural. The approach is analytical and evaluative.

24. Tripathy, R.N. Local Finance in a Developing Economy, Delhi, 1967.

This research work is concerned with the case study of the finances of five selected municipalities and four improvement trusts in Bihar. It analyses the problems of municipal finance in the context of planned economic development, and examines the financial problems of the improvement trusts from the standpoint of proper resources utilisation and expenditure planning. The study is based primarily on secondary materials such as reports and budget documents, and personal interviews.

A Note on Government Reports

In the field of public administration, government reports are widely acknowledged as important aids to research. When these reports are methodically prepared and contain substantial analysis of primary data and information, these come close to research pieces. However, it is the very purpose of government reports to examine a specific problem or problems and to make recommendations. The movement from "is" to "should" is motivated by a desire to help the formulation of public policy, or suggest changes in administration; but it militates against the spirit of scientific research.

Still, the significance of government reports for research in public administration can hardly be exaggerated. These often collect primary data and information which help future researchers. Many a time, the techniques employed by a committee to elicit information help illumine the methodology of future research. A committee report, in course of analysis of problems and recommendations, sheds new light on more researchable topics. The reports have been selected keeping this significance of government documents in mind. The reports are classified into two broad groups dealing respectively with urban administration and the administration

of special areas. There are six important reports under "urban administration", of which three deal with the problem of local finance. These three reports remain even today standard reference documents to the researchers on the subject. The coverages of all the reports are clearly indicated in the enclosed list from which one can easily decipher their significance for urban administration. On the vital problem of regulation of urban land from the standpoint of planned urban development, Report No.4 (in the enclosed list) remains a lone study. Similarly, Report No. 6 is a remarkably well-written account of the history and working of the cantonment administration on which no research study has so far been done. Apart from a macro-view of the problems of urban local bodies, Report No. 5 has dealt with the novel theme of rural-urban relationship from the viewpoint of local planning and development, on which there is ample scope for more sophisticated research.

Important Government Reports

1. Government of India, Report of the Local Finance Enquiry Committee, 1951.

As the title suggests, this report deals with the entire gamut of local finance. After Independence, it marked the pioneering attempt to gather data and information on the subject on all-India basis, spotlight the glaring defects in the financial structure of local authorities including the special purpose bodies, and suggest remedial measures to put local finance on a sound footing.

2. Government of India, Report of the Taxation Enquiry Commission, 1953-54, vol. III, 1955.

This is a well-known report which dealt separately with the problems of local taxation in a very competent and exhaustive fashion. It made important recommendations on the allocation of specific tax revenues for the exclusive use of the local bodies, and suggested other measures for the improvement of local finance.

3. Government of India, Report of the Committee of Ministers constituted by the Central Council of Local Self-Government, Augmentation of Financial Resources of Urban Local Bodies, 1963.

This is a very comprehensive report containing a wealth of municipal financial data on all-India basis. The report has analysed the problems of municipal finance and tried to set

expenditure standards for specific municipal services. Suggestions have been made for the integration of municipal development plans and projects, institutional changes have also been recommended.

4. Government of India, Report of the Committee on Urban Land Policy, 1965.

This report examined the problem of urban land policy in the context of increasing urbanisation and the consequent haphazard growth and the spread of slums and blight in the urban areas. It has classified urban lands into certain types and suggested regulatory measures for the orderly growth of cities and towns.

5. Government of India, Report of the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee, 1966, vols. I, II and III.

This report has dealt inter-alia with the administrative problems of rural-urban integration from the standpoint of balanced regional development. The major portion of the report is, however, devoted to the analysis of municipal problems, and numerous suggestions have been made on such diverse aspects as municipal finance, structure, and personnel, State-local relations and so on. Volume III of the report contains some short studies undertaken by the Committee, and volume II has considerable information on municipal government in India and abroad.

6. Lok Sabha Secretariat, Estimates Committee (1956-57) Forty-sixth Report on the Ministry of Defence: Lands and Cantonments, 1957.

This report has made a detailed study of
cantonment administration in India. Important recommendations
have been made to improve municipal administration in the
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